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ABSTRACT

This leaflet gives guidance on effective practice on organizing literacy and numeracy booster classes for pupils in Year 6 schools in England. The literacy and booster program is designed to provide extra, targeted support to those pupils in Year 6 who, without the benefit of the Literacy Hour and daily mathematics lesson since the beginning of their primary schooling, are unlikely to achieve Level 4 at the end of Key Stage 2. The leaflet does not prescribe any one particular approach but gives guidance on a range of issues that headteachers, literacy and numeracy coordinators and others involved in organizing booster classes should consider when setting up their own programs. Sections of the leaflet discuss the impact of the booster program, deciding which pupils to target, deciding what to teach, deciding who should support pupils, deciding when to hold booster classes, deciding the frequency and duration of lessons, involving parents, and conclusion. (RS)

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Guidance on Organising Literacy and Numeracy Booster Classes.

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Introduction

The literacy and numeracy booster programme began in January 1999. It is designed to provide extra, targeted support to those pupils in Year 6 who, without the benefit of the Literacy Hour and daily mathematics lesson since the beginning of their primary schooling, are unlikely to achieve Level 4 at the end of Key Stage 2.

This leaflet gives guidance on effective practice in organising literacy and numeracy booster classes for pupils in Year 6. It is based on the feedback we have received about the experiences of schools so far. It does not prescribe any one particular approach but gives guidance on a range of issues that headteachers, literacy and numeracy co-ordinators and others involved in organising booster classes should consider when setting up their own programmes.

The impact of the booster programme

Feedback about the booster programme has generally been very positive. Despite the late notification of funding in the first year, Ofsted found that most schools thought booster classes had had a positive impact on attainment. Heads and teachers have confirmed that many pupils, regarded as borderline Level 3/4 and targeted for extra support, have become secure Level 4s. The booster programme has undoubtedly contributed to improved results in many schools and increased pupils' confidence and motivation.

> **There was an obvious benefit – pupils enjoyed the classes, their anxiety diminished and their confidence grew. I believe they achieved better than expected results.**
>
> ***Primary headteacher, Windsor and Maidenhead***

Schools are using the funding available to them to organise their booster programmes successfully in a variety of ways. The starting point should be to decide which pupils to target and what to teach them. Other decisions such as who should teach the lessons and the timing and frequency of classes should follow.

Deciding which pupils to target

The booster programme is for those pupils who need extra, targeted support to secure Level 4. It is not intended as a revision programme for all Year 6 pupils. The majority of schools are targeting small groups of around 6-15 pupils depending on the size of the cohort.

> **The booster classes worked best when there was a cohesive target group in terms of attainment, comprising the better Level 3s and weak Level 4s. The best practice was in schools where the pupils were given a very clear indication of what level they were working at and what they had to do to improve to reach their agreed target.**
>
> ***Walsall LEA***

Deciding what to teach

Clear teaching objectives for booster classes should be determined at the outset followed by a structured programme designed to teach them. Just as pupils have to be carefully targeted, so do the elements of English and mathematics that they are taught. A range of information can be used to tailor booster classes, including an analysis of an individual school's Key Stage 2 test results, QCA's analysis of the tests and teacher assessments of pupils' strengths and weaknesses. Many schools are using careful assessment of pupils' understanding to set clear targets for groups and individuals from the start and to adjust their plans if it becomes apparent, for example, that there are specific areas which children have found particularly difficult or there are misunderstandings which need correcting.

Following such analysis, many schools are focusing on:

Literacy

- writing, i.e. spelling, punctuation, sentence construction and compositional skills;
- reading and writing non-fiction, particularly where boys' attainment is significantly lower than that of girls;
- using reading to model writing.

Griffin Park Primary School in Blackburn used their booster money last year to focus on improving pupils' story writing. Having analysed their previous year's results, Jenny Ennew, Literacy Co-ordinator, decided that whilst pupils were able to structure and organise their stories relatively well, they needed further help to make them more interesting. She identified a group of 12 pupils, all considered as borderline Level 3/4 and taught them for one hour a week for 10 weeks. A supply teacher was brought in to teach her usual class. Jenny used the lessons to look in detail at various short stories and help the children to decide what made them interesting. The children were encouraged to think about the fiction hooks which the writers had used to link the different parts of their stories together. The pupils then practised writing stories using their own fiction hooks. Jenny said there was a noticeable improvement in their writing and all 12 pupils achieved Level 4. When the teachers looked through copies of the targeted pupils' test papers, they saw that the children had used their own ideas for fiction hooks in the tests and that it had really lifted their writing.

Numeracy

- problem-solving techniques and skills, particularly word problems;
- deciding when and how to use a calculator;
- fractions, decimals, percentages, ratio and proportion.

Schools often run mathematics clubs. In a number of cases in the West Midlands, the established club was converted into a booster club for a term, concentrating on topics such as those listed above, which the children attending found particularly challenging. As a result these children were able to tackle their mathematics with much greater confidence in class and subsequently in the national tests.

Children's progress should be monitored against teaching objectives and individual and group targets set at the beginning of the programme. Assessments can be based on informal observation and questioning, tests, and other planned activities designed to judge progress. Many schools already have in place target setting and assessment procedures for the Literacy Hour and daily mathematics lesson which can also be used for booster classes.

A list of materials which schools may find useful when considering the objectives and structure of their booster programme appears at the end of this leaflet. This includes the following new materials that have been made available to support schools with their booster programme from January 2001:

- *The National Numeracy Strategy Sample Year 6 Booster Lessons* – a set of 12 sample lessons available to all schools from December 2000.
- *The National Literacy Strategy Model Lessons for Year 6* – a set of 25 model lessons. These are being developed, along with model lessons for Year 5, as part of a new Year 5/6 intervention programme that is currently being piloted in five local education authorities, and will be available on the Standards Site (www.standards.dfee.gov.uk) only from the end of December 2000.

Deciding who should support pupils

Most schools are using existing class teachers to teach booster lessons because they know the pupils' strengths and weaknesses, have good subject knowledge and understand the literacy and numeracy strategies. Sometimes existing teaching assistants also play a valuable role. Some schools are making good use of support staff such as those with expertise in working with children with special educational needs or English as an additional language.

> **Because we have a mixed Year 5/6 class we used the extra funds to employ a teacher two mornings a week to teach Y5. This allowed the class teacher to devote time specifically to the Y6 pupils. With her knowledge of their strengths and weaknesses she was able to plan and deliver a programme of work for both individual and group needs. Everyone benefited.**
>
> ***Primary school, West Berkshire***

> **We used a teacher with Key Stage 2 marking experience to identify shortcomings and plan appropriate materials to improve these areas.**
>
> ***Primary school, Buckinghamshire***

Deciding when to hold booster classes

Booster classes are working successfully both during and out of school hours. The majority of schools are running their classes during school hours to allow existing staff who know the pupils to take the classes and to secure better attendance by pupils. Some schools are providing additional support during the Literacy Hour and daily mathematics lesson. However,

children undoubtedly stand a better chance of catching up if booster classes are arranged in addition to their normal literacy and mathematics lessons, whether that is during or out of school hours. In a subject like mathematics, children find it particularly difficult to catch up if they are always missing new work while they are trying to get to grips with the foundations.

Common approaches include releasing the usual class teacher or bringing in an extra teacher to create an additional group or reduce class sizes. Teachers and pupils welcome working in smaller groups and being able to give and receive more targeted, individual support. Some schools with mixed Year 5/6 classes are choosing to create separate year groups. Many schools report that in addition to more confidence, pupils' behaviour and motivation improves too in smaller groups.

Speenhamland Primary School in Newbury uses their booster programme money to buy in extra staff from their bank of regular supply teachers. The extra teachers are used either to teach the booster classes themselves or to release a more experienced teacher. Speenhamland's headteacher, Carolyn Maddox, says that it is a definite advantage to be able to find someone with specific expertise in teaching the top end of Key Stage 2 or even Key Stage 3.

Speenhamland School already runs a play club before and after school so the booster classes are run during school hours and the target pupils given some extra homework. In the first year, the school used their funds to provide booster classes at the same time as the normal Literacy Hour and daily mathematics lesson every day for 11 weeks from February to May. But the longer notice in the second year meant that there was more time to think ahead and classes began in September instead.

Some schools are using the booster funding to provide additional support from a teaching assistant in the classroom. The assistant often works with a small group of around six pupils on areas they are finding difficult, for example, decimals and place value, or equivalence of fractions, or supporting writing by focusing on sentence level work. Games can play an important part. Sometimes the assistant supervises the rest of the class while the teacher teaches a group. Alternatively, during whole-class sessions, the assistant can sit with a group and help them prepare answers so that they can join in with others.

Kevin Butler, Headteacher of Ledger Lane Primary School, Wakefield used booster money to employ a support assistant to work alongside him during the daily mathematics lesson. The assistant provided additional teaching support to those borderline Level 3/4 children. Under the head's guidance she ensured these children participated fully in the oral and mental starter. During the main part of the lesson she would continue to support this group of children, often in another teaching area, providing additional teaching time on aspects of mathematics the children found difficult or particularly challenging. "What is interesting," said the headteacher, "is that the overall gain in this year's test results was six to seven percentage points but those children targeted with booster money made twice the gain!"

A large number of schools are running their booster classes out of school hours – either immediately before or after school, at weekends or during the holidays. Many teachers say that the atmosphere is more relaxed and the children more committed. Some schools which run their classes after school give the pupils (and teachers!) a short break before starting.

The sessions during the holidays went very well. The children were very 'fresh', positive and worked very hard.

Primary School, Redcar and Cleveland

Cromwell Road Primary School in Middlesbrough have used their booster money to run extra English and mathematics lessons after school for the last two years. Additional classes were taught on two evenings a week, one for English and one for mathematics, during the spring term. In the school's second year of running booster classes, the headteacher Brenda Urwin, decided that more attention needed to be given to improve writing. The extra literacy lessons began in early January, ahead of the extra mathematics lessons which started in the February half term. A total of seven teachers from across the school put themselves forward to take the extra literacy classes. The children were sorted into small ability groups of between 4–7 pupils and received extra lessons for at least an hour after school. Brenda said, "we continued to concentrate on writing during their usual Literacy Hours but the additional help after school really made a difference. Last year 43% of our pupils achieved Level 4+ in English but this year that rose to 57% even with what I believe was a marginally poorer cohort."

Deciding the frequency and duration of lessons

Again, schools are successfully adopting a variety of approaches. Some are running extra classes during the school day two or three times a week. Others are providing revision clubs after school on a weekly basis. Whatever the frequency and duration of lessons, schools report that pupils have benefited most from sustained support over a length of time. It is therefore important for schools to plan their programmes in time for a late autumn or early spring start.

Great Coates School in Grimsby, North East Lincolnshire have been using some of their booster money to run extra lessons after school. For eight weeks during the spring term, extra lessons were taught on one afternoon a week each in English and mathematics. Each lesson was taught by four existing members of staff to around 22–25 Year 6 pupils for an hour after school. The target pupils were those whom staff had identified as borderline Level 3/4 and some solid Level 3s who would also benefit from extra help. The school secured good attendance by writing to parents in advance to seek their support and by holding a meeting to explain the booster programme and answer any questions they had. A non-teaching assistant followed up the few pupils who did not attend. In English, the lessons focused on three specific areas: spelling, handwriting,

and reading and exam techniques such as skimming. In mathematics, the lessons focused on mental and oral work and reading and interpreting exam questions. Sue Hawke, Assessment Co-ordinator, who organised the booster classes, said, "We felt this year's programme was much better than in the first year. We really focused on giving the pupils the techniques they need to do better in the tests." The hard work put in by teachers and pupils was rewarded when all 25 pupils targeted for English achieved Level 4+ and 19 of the 22 pupils targeted for mathematics did too.

Involving parents

Schools should inform parents in advance about their booster programme even if the lessons take place during the school day. Many schools are finding the support and involvement of parents important, not just in securing attendance where classes take place outside the school day, but in keeping children motivated and giving them opportunities to practise at home what they have learnt.

One school held a workshop for all parents of Y6 children. The school had to work hard to ensure a high attendance from parents. Children and parents worked together in looking at past papers and at levels of attainment. Parents were given ideas and guidance for supporting their child. Last year the meeting was held in January but proved so successful that it was held earlier this year to provide more time for parental support to have an effect.

Walsall LEA

Conclusion

Booster classes are working successfully using a range of approaches. In some cases a mix of in school and out of school hours provision may be the most appropriate. Schools have different circumstances and experiences which will affect the way in which they decide to organise their programmes.

The ability to be flexible has enabled those who need teacher input to receive it, those who need teaching support assistant input to receive it and those who are reluctant to speak out in a more confident group to have the opportunity in a small group situation to express their opinions.

Primary School, West Berkshire

Further copies and other useful material

Further copies of this leaflet are available by quoting ref. DfEE 0251/2000 from:

DfEE Publications
PO Box 5050
Sudbury
Suffolk CO10 6ZQ

Tel: 0845 60 222 60
Fax: 0845 60 333 60
Textphone: 0845 60 555 60
Email: dfee@prolog.uk.com

Other DfEE/NLS/NNS documents which schools might find useful are listed below and unless otherwise stated are available from the DfEE Publications address above.

- *The National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies. Revision guidance for Year 6 pupils* reference RGY6
- *The National Literacy Strategy. Revision guidance for Year 6 pupils: Activity Resource Sheets* reference RGY6ARS
- *The National Literacy Strategy. Revision guidance for Year 6 pupils: Suggested lesson plans* reference RGY6SLP
- *The National Numeracy Strategy. Sample Year 6 Booster Lessons* reference DfEE 0326/2000
- *Springboard 5* numeracy material reference DfEE 0151/2000 contains video material of mathematics catch-up sessions which teachers may find helpful for teaching strategies. This is being distributed to all Year 5 teachers in the autumn term 2000 at LEA training.
- *The National Numeracy Strategy. More Numeracy Lessons* reference MNL
- *The National Literacy Strategy. Making Links: Units of Work for Literacy Summer Schools* reference SSY7L
- *The National Numeracy Strategy. Guidance for Summer Numeracy Schools* reference SSY7N

The following materials are available on the Standards Site (www.standards.dfee.gov.uk) only:

- *The National Literacy Strategy. Model Lessons for Year 6* (from the end of December 2000)
- *The National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies. Making Links: Guidance for Summer Schools and Year 7 Catch-up Programmes* reference SSY7

Schools may also find previous Key Stage 2 test materials and mark schemes, and QCA's Key Stage 2 Standards Reports useful. These can be ordered from QCA at the address below and are priced from £3. Please quote the relevant reference numbers when ordering copies.

- *Key Stage 2 test materials (teacher's pack)* reference QCA 00501.
- *QCA Standards Report* reference QCA 99 515

Teachers may also find it helpful to consult the Testbase materials which were sent to all schools with the Standards Report.

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